

**TANGO-2 CLASSIFIED**

**PROJECT UMBRA — ECHOARCHIVE6 REPOSITORY**

**Decryption Status:** PARTIAL

**File ID:** UMBRA-ENDLESSWAR-MARCH-CYCLE-RASHID-01

**Containment Directive:** Ω-9

**Integrity Rating:** Unstable (Recursive Contamination Detected)

**Note:** Recovered from degraded storage node during post-incident forensic sweep of AO-█. Original file exhibited recursive narrative structure and anomalous metadata reformation. Source presumed cognitively compromised or subsumed.

Viewer discretion strongly advised. File marked as [MENTAL CONTAMINATION RISK: ECHO-3].

**Review and redact per Directive 109-ECHO-TAC/LOCK.**

**TEXT:** The air smelled of burnt earth and old blood. Rashid moved through the ruins of a city whose name he refused to remember. Names meant history. History meant permanence. Nothing here was permanent. He once told his younger brother the same thing, the night before enlisting. 'This war will pass,' he'd said, gripping Ahmed's shoulder. 'I'll be home before the olive trees bear fruit.' That was two years ago. The trees had withered instead. He no longer wrote home. There was nothing left to say. His unit advanced in staggered formation, boots crunching over shattered brick. The sun was a low, blood-orange smear behind the haze of smoke. Somewhere in the wreckage, a prayer call still played through a distant loudspeaker—warped, broken, a voice calling the faithful to a mosque that no longer stood.

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Rashid's grip tightened on his rifle. This was his country. His war. His march. A hand signal. His commander, Captain Firas, gestured toward the alley ahead—a narrow passage, choked with debris, perfect for an ambush. Rashid moved first. That was his job. Advance, clear, survive. Repeat.

He rounded the corner.

The world ripped apart.

A deafening roar. White light. Silence.

Rashid woke up gasping, dust clogging his throat. His ears rang, his body numb except for the ache in his ribs. He was lying on his back, staring up at the sky—dark now. Hadn't it been sunset? No, something was wrong.

He rolled to his knees. His rifle lay beside him, half-buried in the dirt. His unit was gone. No bodies, no blood. The alley was gone, too—the whole street was different. He knew this wasn't concussion. He knew this wasn't possible.

But he had his training. He had his orders. Advance, clear, survive. Repeat.

Rashid moved forward. The road was not the same road.

Rashid moved carefully, his boots whispering over dust-covered pavement that hadn't been there before. His body ached—not from injury, but from something deeper. Something misplaced.

The alley where the explosion had taken him was gone. In its place, a different ruin. He exhaled, steadying himself. Advance, clear, survive. Repeat.

A distant voice crackled over his radio—his own name, spoken in a tone he didn't recognize.

He turned the corner and saw them.

His unit—exactly where they had been before. Captain Firas, crouched near a rusted car chassis.

Kareem, covering the far end of the street. Alive. Intact. Unaware. He hesitated. His grip tightened on his rifle.

“Rashid, move up.”

The order came from Firas, exactly as it had before.

He knew what came next. He had already died here.

A static hum built in his skull. The explosion was coming. But it didn't.

Something else happened.

The shadows shifted.

Not light moving—the dark itself curling, thickening, reaching.

Kareem turned his head slightly, frowning. “Did you hear that?”

Rashid opened his mouth, but the words caught in his throat. He didn't know what he was going to say.

The moment did not belong to him anymore.

His feet moved. Not his decision.

He stepped forward, just as he had before, just as he would again. Advance, clear, survive. Repeat.

The street stretched longer than it should.

Rashid felt it in his legs first—the unnatural weight, the slow drag of motion. His boots struck pavement that wasn't where it should have been, the echoes dull and misaligned. Like marching in a dream, where distances stretched and shrank at will.

He turned his head. Kareem was still at the end of the street, unmoving. Watching. Waiting. The exact same position. The exact same breath.

No one else noticed.

His heartbeat climbed. He had seen this before.

“Clear the alley,” Firas ordered. “We keep moving.”

Rashid clenched his jaw. The alley wasn't there. Not anymore. It had shifted the first time, replaced by something else. But Firas acted as if nothing had changed. The others followed the order, slipping forward into a passage that had not existed a moment ago. Rashid did not follow.

He stepped back. Defied the march.

His radio hissed.

A voice, broken by static: "Rashid, move up."

The same words, the same tone. But wrong.

He swallowed. His hands felt stiff, fingers locked around his rifle as though they might never move again. If he followed, he would die again.

If he refused—

The sky twisted.

A smear of deep red burned across the horizon, colors spilling in ways they shouldn't. Shapes without form pulsed at the edges of his vision, massive and formless. The march continued without him. His unit faded into the alley, swallowed by the shifting dark.

Something watched. Something knew. And then the ground beneath him dropped away. He fell.

Rashid hit the ground.

Or at least, something like ground. It wasn't solid, wasn't soft, wasn't right. His body absorbed the impact too slowly, like he had landed in thick water that refused to let him sink. A battlefield submerged in something unseen.

He gasped for breath. The air tasted stale, metallic, like old blood left too long in the sun. His ears rang, but beneath the high-pitched whine, he heard it—boots on pavement, marching.

His heartbeat surged. No. Not again.

He pushed himself up, legs trembling, his rifle digging into his shoulder. His hands ached, his fingers stiff like they had been holding the weapon for years. A lifetime of marching. A lifetime of war.

Ahead, his unit walked the same path. Firas at point. Kareem covering the rear. Unchanged. But not untouched. The buildings on either side seemed older—eroded, as if centuries had passed overnight. The road stretched longer than before, its edges curling away into an abyss his mind refused to name. The sky pulsed—not red, but something deeper, the color of decay itself. He inhaled, but his lungs only found dust. Rashid’s breath caught—Kareem’s rifle was wrong. A different model. An older one, Soviet-era. But Kareem didn’t notice. No one did. The street sign ahead was in Arabic.

Had it always been? He swore, the last time, it had been in English. The letters twisted, reforming as he blinked. Kareem turned slightly, just enough for Rashid to see— His eyes were gone.

The alley was back.

The sky was the same burnt red. The ruins stood just as they had before, but the details were wrong. Too sharp. Too blurred. The edges frayed at the corners of his sight. He had woken up again. But something had shifted.

A whisper scratched at the back of his mind. Not sound. Thought. Like something finishing his sentences before he thought them. “Move up.” Rashid shuddered. The order hadn’t come from Firas this time. It had come from inside him.

He flinched. The radio was silent, but the whisper was still there, threading through his skull like a crack in glass. Something breaking. Something pushing through.

“Move up.”

Rashid shuddered. The order hadn’t come from Firas this time.

It had come from inside him.

His breath hitched. His feet moved. Not by choice.

Advance. Clear. Survive.

Repeat.

Rashid no longer counted how many times he had woken up. The alley. The sky. The march. Over and over, with only the smallest shifts. The details rotted at the edges of his mind, unraveling thread by thread.

Names felt strange now. His own name. His comrades'. The sounds of them slid away like oil on water, ungraspable. Had he ever had a name?

The march did not need names. The march needed only motion.

Advance. Clear. Survive.

Repeat.

He stopped speaking to the others. They weren't real. Not in the way he had once thought. They existed only as part of the rhythm.

He watched Firas give the orders, saw Kareem check his sector, saw the squad move as they always had. Perfect. Repetitive. Hollow.

The whisper in his head was no longer a whisper. It was his own voice. It was not speaking to him. It was speaking as him. *You are not Rashid. You are not a soldier. You*

*are the march.* He opened his mouth. He meant to scream. Instead, he said: "Advance. Clear. Survive. Repeat." And he obeyed.

Advance. Clear. Survive. Repeat.

He had resisted once. That was before he understood. There was nothing else.

The war would not let him go. The march had no end. But Rashid tried. He threw down his rifle—a weapon that had marched with him in every loop. It clattered against the pavement. He did not pick it up. He clenched his jaw, squared his shoulders, planted his feet. No. He would not move. He would not

obey. A breath. Silence. Then his body betrayed him. His feet lifted. His legs moved. Not by his will.

Advance. Clear. Survive. Repeat. The war did not need his permission.

He did not wake up this time. Because he had never woken up at all. He was part of it now.

Just another soldier. Just another step in the march. Advance. Clear. Survive. Repeat.

He was part of it now. Just another soldier. Just another step in the march. He had resisted once. He had tried. But the march did not need his permission. Somewhere, beyond war itself, a thing counted his steps. And waited.

**[END OF RECONSTRUCTED TRANSCRIPT]**

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**PROJECT UMBRA – INTERNAL DOCUMENT CLOSURE**

**File ID: UMBRA-ENDLESSWAR-MARCH-CYCLE-RASHID-01**

**Archival Node: EchoArchive6**

**Review Status: TERMINATED**

**Cognitive Threat Level: ECHO-3**

**Recursive Depth: UNVERIFIED**

**Summary:**

Subject narrative terminated mid-pattern collapse. Manifestation of identity degradation, syntactic echo-looping, and convergence with a previously undocumented MARCH-class recursion field confirmed.

All recovery personnel exposed to File 01 are currently under quarantine review per Directive Ω-9.

DO NOT REPLICATE.

DO NOT TRANSMIT.

DO NOT ENGAGE MARCH-PATTERN SEQUENCES VERBALLY OR INTERNALLY.

Next file flagged for review:

**\*\*UMBRA-ENDLESSWAR-MARCH-CYCLE-[REDACTED]-02\*\***

This file is classified under TANGO-2 security clearance.

Access outside of EchoArchive6 protocol will result in immediate audit.

Further loops pending containment.

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ADVANCE. CLEAR. SURVIVE. REPEAT.

DOCUMENT SEALED.